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SUBJECT: YEMENI PROTESTORS OUT IN FORCE IN REACTION TO GAZA
'MASSACRE'

SUMMARY

¶1. Massive protests have been organized throughout Yemen since December 27, continuing into the 30, in reaction to the Israeli military operations in the Gaza Strip. Yemeni government officials, political parties, labor unions, and human rights organizations have issued statements condemning the attacks. While some anti-American rhetoric has been interwoven with the anti-Israeli sentiment of the protests, more ire has been focused on the Arab governments' reaction to the crisis, particularly the Egyptian government. According to press reports, the Egyptian consulate in the southern city of Aden was overrun by protestors on December 30. End Summary.

YEMENIS GATHER FOR PROTESTS, EXPRESS ANGER WITH EGYPT

¶2. An estimated 40,000 protestors gathered in al-Thawra soccer stadium on December 28 as tens of thousands choked Sana'a's streets in a show of popular solidarity with the Gazans. The protestors listened to speeches from ruling and opposition party leaders condemning the attacks and "America providing cover" for Israel's actions. Several speakers called for a "boycott" of the United States. Thousands of Yemeni women gathered on December 29 in al-Dhurafi stadium, near the center of Sana'a. Protestors called on Arab leaders to boycott ties with Israel, offer monetary support for the Palestinian people and to open the Rafah crossing with the Gaza Strip on a permanent basis. Another women's protest took place on December 30 in al-Dhurafi stadium.

¶3. On the morning of December 30, the focus of the protests turned to the role of Arab governments in solving the crisis, with an estimated crowd of 5000 protestors gathering near the Egyptian embassy in Sana'a in protest of the GOE's refusal to open its border with Gaza. In Aden, regional Arabic-language media is reporting that hundreds of protestors stormed the Egyptian consulate in the former capital of South Yemen. Protestors reportedly tore down the Egyptian flag and replaced it with a Palestinian one.

¶4. There were similar protests reported throughout Yemen's major cities, including Aden, Ta'iz, Hodaydah, and Ibb. Students of the Aden University demonstrated on December 28 and condemned "the US-backed Israeli massacres in Gaza" as well as "Arab agents for Israel in Ramallah, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan who have provided Gaza on a golden plate to Jews." In the city of Rada'a demonstrators called on leaders of the Arab and Islamic countries and the UN Security Council to immediately intervene to stop the Israeli "massacres" in Gaza.

CONDEMNATIONS, CONDEMNATIONS, AND MORE CONDEMNATIONS

¶5. Many different organs of the ROYG have been quick to condemn the Gaza attacks. President Ali Abdullah Saleh called for Arab unity in the face of "the Israeli cruel massacres." He described the developments in Gaza as "a challenge for Arab and Muslims and may be a reaction to what happened in Iraq." Saleh continued, "This is their massacre from which they want us to learn democracy. They want us to learn democracy while they kill and bury democracy." Foreign Minister Abubakr al-Qirbi denounced what he described as "terror practices and war crimes being committed by the Zionist enemy against the unarmed and innocent people of the Gaza Strip in Palestine."

¶6. The ruling General People's Congress (GPC) party issued a statement condemning the attacks and calling for "massive demonstrations until the end of the Israeli aggression on Gaza." The GPC statement went on to describe the internal division between Palestinian political groups as the main factor that has "weakened Arab solidarity with the Palestinian issue, which has encouraged Israel to continue its aggressions on the Palestinian people." The GPC called on the Palestinians to "unite and face the fact that the internal divisions do not serve the Palestinian cause." The opposition Joint Meeting Parties (JMP) also issued a statement in condemnation of "Israeli genocide in the Gaza Strip."

ARAB LEADERSHIP, NOT AMERICA, PLAYS THE SCAPEGOAT

¶7. While harsh criticism for USG policy on Israel-Palestine is commonplace in Yemeni protests, this current round of demonstrations has largely been devoid of incendiary anti-American sentiment. The Yemeni press has widely reported on steps taken by the ROYG to extend the security cordon around the U.S. Embassy in recent days, but there has been no serious attempt to protest near the Embassy, or to make US policy the center focus of any of the protests.

¶8. Conversely, these protests have witnessed heretofore unprecedented criticism of Arab governments. In addition to the protests at Egypt's diplomatic facilities in Yemen, Yemeni journalists have starkly criticized Arab leaders for their lack of positive intervention in Gaza. [Note: To date, there has been no public criticism of Hamas in the Yemeni media by the ROYG or any other Yemeni source, nor does Post expect there will be. End Note.] In an essay published in the main government-owned daily newspaper "al-Thawra," political scientist and columnist Abdulaziz al-Maqaleh called on the Arab people to turn to God to help Gaza, concluding that the Arab leadership was impotent to do anything of value. Al-Maqaleh said that, "there is no hope for the Arab leaders, they did nothing to protect Gaza, despite knowing about the attack in advance....Give up on our leaders, only God will help us." Other commentators spoke of an "Arab conspiracy" to allow the Gaza operation to continue, in collusion with "international powers."

BRYAN